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Public Affairs
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CACTUS POACHERS SENTENCED TO FEDERAL PRISON FOR THEFT OF SAGUAROS

TUCSON, Ariz. – U.S. District Judge Raner C. Collins has sentenced two Tucson men for the theft of saguaro cacti from Saguaro National Park. Joseph Tillman, 50, was sentenced in late October to eight months in federal prison. Tillman's co-defendant, Gregory James McKee, 42, was sentenced recently to six months of home confinement and 100 hours of community service.

Both McKee and Tillman pleaded guilty to violations of the Lacey Act, which prohibits trafficking in plants and animals collected in violation of any law, treaty, or regulation of the United States or in violation of any Indian tribal law. Saguaros are protected under Arizona's native plant law and require protection from illegal collection because of their vulnerability to loss or damage from theft, vandalism, development, off-road vehicles, and air pollution and because of their slow reproduction and rate of growth, which have made nursery propagation difficult.

On January 12, 2007, McKee and Tillman removed two saguaro cacti from within the boundaries of Saguaro National Park. Earlier that day National Park Service Rangers had discovered several saguaros had been dug up and cached for later transport, along a roadway adjacent to the park's Tucson Mountain District. As a result of an investigation, McKee and Tillman were identified as having removed the saguaros from the park and transporting them in a truck driven by McKee.

"This activity will not be taken lightly," stated Dennis K. Burke, U.S. Attorney for the District of Arizona. "Indeed, this is one of the longest sentences ever for cactus-rustling in this District. Creative landscaping is no excuse to plunder natural treasures from our national parks."

After sentencing, the park's Chief Ranger, Robert Love, said "Saguaros have become a valuable commodity and are increasingly targeted by thieves and poachers." Commenting further, Love stated, "Sentences like the ones imposed on Tillman and McKee send a strong message to those who plunder our Nation's natural resources."

Upon release from prison, both defendants will be placed on supervised release for a term of 36 months. The investigation in this case was conducted by the National Park Service. The prosecution was handled by the U.S. Attorney's Office, District of Arizona, Tucson.

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For more information on Saguaro National Park, visit <http://www.nps.gov/sagu>